

## Sustainable Development Goals: The need for a European strategy

Written by Elly Schlein on 23 May 2019 in Opinion  
Opinion

The EU must make a stronger, more-coordinated commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals to achieve the ambitious targets in time, argues Elly Schlein.



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Climate change, growing inequality, poverty and hunger, peace and democracy. These are the pressing challenges of our time.

They lie at the very core of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which was approved in September 2015 by the governments of the 193 United Nations member countries.

The aim of this ambitious, comprehensive and transformative agenda is to eradicate poverty and build a fair and sustainable future that “leaves no-one behind”.

Among its most important features is the Agenda 2030, which encompasses 17 Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs).

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This underlines the States' commitment to undertaking all the necessary measures and mobilising all resources and instruments in order to achieve these goals.

Our Parliament has closely followed the Agenda negotiating process, approving a resolution in November 2014 that supported the most innovative aspects of the new approach; the universality and the interlinked nature of the goals as well as the importance of a human-rights based approach.

A delegation of MEPs from different political groups was present when the Agenda was approved at the UN General Assembly.

Since then, along with my colleagues, I have persistently called on the European Commission and Member States to lead by example by developing an overarching EU strategy for the Agenda's implementation.

Over the last three years, the EU and its Member States have made some progress on the various goals and targets.

However, in order to achieve the ambitious goals in time, we need to see a much greater commitment in terms of political will and the resources required.

“There is also still a lack of coordination; the EU has not yet established an overarching European strategy for the implementation of the Agenda”

And there is also still a lack of coordination; the EU has not yet established an overarching European strategy for implementing the Agenda.

This is why the Annual Strategic Report on the Implementation and Delivery of the SDGs, approved on 14 March 2019 by the European Parliament - which I followed as Shadow Rapporteur for the S&D group - represented an important opportunity to reiterate the call for a European strategy.

The report delivered a clear message on sustainable development ahead of the upcoming European elections and represents an important contribution to the reporting of the EU on SDGs within the framework of the high-level political forum taking place in New York in July.

The annual report stressed the need for the EU to make more-intensive efforts to integrate the SDGs within its internal and external policies as well as in its governance structures.

To achieve the latter, the European Parliament has called for a clear roadmap with specific deadlines, together with an assessment of the existing EU policies, synergies, gaps and inconsistencies.

Moreover, the text called for coordinated action at the different levels - local, regional, national and European - ensuring coherence between them, and, at the same time, promoting the implementation of the Agenda through an inclusive process, involving all stakeholders and civil society organisations.

At the same time, the European Parliament stressed how the Agenda's implementation process should ensure both coherence between EU policies and between their internal and external dimension, in order to align them with the SDGs.

To this end, the EU and its Member States should recommit to the principle of policy coherence for development.

In addition, the European Parliament underlined how ensuring coherence also means avoiding the negative impacts of EU policies on sustainable development in developing countries.

Finally, the text reiterated that the Agenda represents a financial commitment that should be reflected in all EU financial instruments, in particular within the Multiannual Financial Framework.

In this context, the text called for sufficient resources to promote a fair transition towards more sustainable economic and social patterns.

“The annual report stressed the need for the European Union to put stronger efforts in the process of integration of the SDGs within its internal and external policies”

In parallel, the European Parliament underlined that resources should also be devoted to implementing the Agenda in developing countries, where the financial gap is estimated between US\$1.9tr and US\$3.1tr each year from now until 2030.

It is of the utmost importance that EU countries recommit to the target of spending 0.7 percent of gross national income on Official Development Assistance.

The road to fully achieving the Agenda 2030 remains long and full of obstacles.

At a time when multilateralism is in crisis and the relevant international actors are abdicating their own responsibilities by backing out from important commitments, it is now time for the EU to lead the process of reaching the SDGs and meeting the responsibilities we have to future generations.

The next European Parliament will have the fundamental task of continuing to monitor the actions of the European Commission and Member States in implementing this Agenda.

### **About the author**



Elly Schlein (IT, S&D) is shadow rapporteur on the implementation and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals report

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